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Students' renewable-energy plan will use roads to capture sun's energy

BY OSEYE T. BOYD • OBOYD@MUNCIE.GANNETT.COM • FEBRUARY 14, 2009

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NEW CASTLE -- Five [students](#) from New Castle Area Career Programs could revolutionize how Americans use energy in the next 10 years -- and stimulate the economy in the process.

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Under the students' plan, Americans would no longer be reliant on fossil fuel, harnessing energy from the sun to power [homes](#), cars and businesses. Factories would become power plants, converting vehicles to solar power and planes to hydrogen power, creating jobs and providing a true economic stimulus plan.

The plan is part of the group's project for the Conrad Foundation's Pete Conrad Spirit of Innovation Award competition. Known as NCACP Engineering, the team will travel to the Ames [NASA](#) Research Center, Moffett Field, Calif., for the contest. NCACP was one of 21 finalists chosen out of 100 teams that entered the competition.

"I'm pumped," said Tyler Lowhorn, a New Castle Chrysler High School senior.

The project began as an idea thrown out by pre-engineering instructor Kelly Neal to see if any students were interested in the competition. They were.

The five students created a proposal that would turn existing major highways and roads into sun catchers by replacing asphalt roads with solar panels topped with a special type of glass that can be driven on. The energy captured from the roads would be used for power.

Moving to renewable energy won't hit wallets as hard as one might think, the group said. For example, if a person's current electric bill is \$100, it would cost only an additional \$20 to power a car for a month, said Josh Morris, a senior at Hagerstown Junior-Senior High School.

Additionally, the government could pay for upgrades to vehicles, the plan suggested, and all new vehicles should be made to use renewable energy. On long road trips, drivers can stop at battery stations instead of filling up at gas stations.

"They're always a set price," Stuart Hamby, a senior at New Castle, said of the batteries. "What fluctuates like gas?"



Hagerstown senior Josh Morris, (from bottom left) Knightstown junior Zach Small and New Castle seniors Jeff Guffey, Tyler Lowhorn and Stuart Hamby meet to discuss their plan for the NASA Renewable Energy Project. (Melanie Maxwell / THE STAR PRESS)

CAST YOUR VOTE

The New Castle Area Career Programs (NCACP) Engineering team needs your help to win the Pete Conrad Spirit of Innovation Award competition. Online voting counts towards overall judging so the more votes the better.

You can vote at www.conradawards.org/ncacp_engineering.

The team will leave for Ames NASA Research Center on March 31. The competition runs April 2-4.

Donations for the team are accepted at www.spaceportindiana.com.

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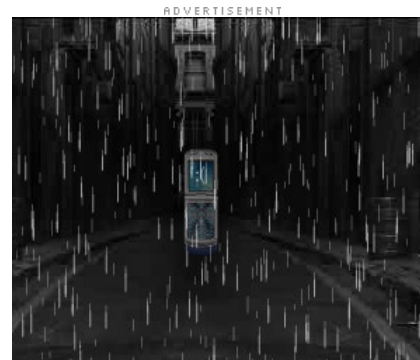
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